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123 sional patch of grass, which the rushing fire had missed, there was not a living green plant below the four-foot line. Burning the country is an annual occurrence and many are the laws governing 221 who may burn and who may subsequently hunt in the newly cleared 224 land. Because the fires are set each year, there is no accumulation of dry tinder to feed the fire and allow it to rage uncontrollably. Only the grass and a few fallen logs catch and these will burn rapidly and fiercely, but for a very short period. Any gap in the vegetation will stop the fire and the heavy dew, falling in the evening, will also put out the flames, leaving perhaps only isolated, smouldering logs to burn through the night. Until the first shoots of new grass push [421] their way through the charred ground, the individual hunter who set the fire has exclusive rights to the area he set alight. Of course, no one except those who belong to that country may burn without [671] permission of the owners. As far as possible, these laws are still upheld.

123 We soon came to a branch in the path and Albert indicated that we two girls should continue straight ahead; he would stop behind. In front of us stretched the fresh-water swamp. Out of the almost inky but clear water rose the gnarled paperbark trees, their roots so intertwined they almost formed a floor, albeit a most slippery and irregular one, over the rotten vegetation in the bottom of the swamp. I picked a particularly large rooted tree for my bath [515] tub, and a short distance away Agnes did the same. If one was careful not to disturb the fine deposit on the bottom but managed to stay on top of the slippery roots, the clear cool water was as sweet and soft as one could wish for. We stayed for about an hour, washing ourselves and our clothes, but finally an impatient call from Albert put an end to this pleasure. Albert had been hunting for a possum, but in this area so close to the camp, they had already been depleted.

123 Instead of returning to camp, Albert decided that now was as 411 good a time as any to cut his *milingani*, the sticks with which they 322 kill the geese. After another mile or so into the bush, we came to a grove of stout bushes of a kind I had not seen before. They had [223] long, straight branches of about a half-inch diameter. These Albert

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Fig. 13. Gathering water-lillies in a fresh-water swamp

cut and after he had collected about thirty he selected a nice, smooth ledge of rock in the shade to work further on the sticks. First he stripped the bark, then measuring them against his arm he cut them so that each stick was as long as the distance from his fingertips to his elbow. All this he did with his knife, holding it by the tip of its long blade so that the handle would add its weight to each blow. He carefully smoothed off the two ends so there were no loose splinters. We each took a bundle of these sticks, tied them with strips of pandanus, and returned to the camp. Here they were laid in the water close to the bank and weighted down with a rock. This would make them good and heavy, it was explained.

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During the afternoon, the two men worked on the permanent house which Bill Grimster had ordered. Big Jack had spent the morning cutting posts and had brought in about half a dozen. By late afternoon, when the others returned, they had been set upright in holes dug to individual measure so that they stood firm without bracing.

Once everyone had returned, a fire was built. The men collected their individual bundles of *milingani* and placed the ends of the dripping sticks in the flames. They squatted over the sticks and individually started a chant during which they cupped their hands in the smoke and carrying it to their bodies, slapped their necks, then their arms. "Knar. Knar Gerra doo (slap), Gerra doo (slap)." The chant was nothing more than the imitation of the cries of the geese and the whir of the sticks. They explained that to bring the geese down they had to hit it directly on the neck or wings. "Why

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Fig. 14. "Cooking milingani"

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do you cook the sticks?" I asked. "To make them dry so they won't slip in our hands," they replied.

Once the sticks were all well charred on the ends the men took them down to the canoe. For once, I used my status of ethnographer and overruled my role of a woman, and accompanied the men on what was properly men's business. The presence of women or children might bring bad luck. Whether the explanation was simply that women and children are considered to be lacking in the amount of silence or immobility required, or whether the reason was more subtle, I never found out. "This properly men's business," was the only explanation.

We took the canoe a quarter of a mile up stream, where we

disembarked on the edge of a large expanse of wet, grassy marsh. On the bank a few low trees provided cover for the hunters, who spread out about fifty yards apart. We waited. Then in the distance the first flock of six geese appeared, flying low over the marsh. They were not headed for us, but passed over the line of hunters about a hundred yards upstream. We could not see the hunters, but the same six geese continued safely after passing the firing line. Now another small group of geese seemed to be heading in our direction. Albert slowly took his position, his legs apart, the left stretched in front, the right somewhat bent as his body arched backward. One *milingani* he held near the charred end in his right arm which was so far back over his head that the tip of the stick almost touched the ground. As counter balance, his left hand, holding several spares, was pointed forward toward the geese. Just as the geese were to pass over our heads, they swerved and went instead over the man to the right of us. You could hear the whir of the stick as it was thrown with tremendous force up into the air, turning end over end, and then the 'thwack' as it reached its mark. A goose, its neck hanging loosely, spiralled down, to land with a splash close to the hunter's feet.

Now the flocks were more numerous as the dusk grew thicker. Soon a group flew directly overhead and Albert aimed and threw, but the spiralling stick slid off the wing tip of the lead goose and he continued, somewhat shaken but quite unharmed. Again and again Albert threw at the increasing numbers of honking homeward-bound geese, but when the last stick was thrown and it was quite dark, we still had no geese. When we gathered, it was found that out of ten hunters with perhaps three hundred sticks thrown, only two sticks had found their mark. This was not good. Albert was worried. "Maybe someone bin die, make me bad luck."

Later that evening Black Joe started singing a chant. "*Mobuditi*, plenty goose here; give us some." I asked him whom he was singing to and, although names of the dead are most infrequently mentioned for fear that the ghost of that person, its *mobuditi*, will hear it, this was one occasion where the *mobuditi* could do more good than harm. So the *mobuditi* of Bangri was called upon. Bangri, it was explained, had been a big man, "Plenty wives, maybe hundred. This his country; him grave close up along

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Fig. 15. Weather-worn poles mark the grave of someone long dead but not forgotten

223 bush. He bin die long time ago." This had been his country while
789 alive and it was still his country, for his spirit remains near the
775 grave and still hunts the wild animals and birds, while the spirits of his wives collect the wild yams, and his little spirit children play in the bush. Bangri will share this food with others who come, and their *mobudities*, should they die and be buried in the country, for as long as his name is remembered, and until his grave-posts rot with the passing of time.

123 But Bangri was not cooperative. The next day the hunters found little game in the bush and the women turned to the laborious
[222 job of digging six-foot holes with a stick to obtain the small yams
224] that are to be found at this season. Again the grass was too thick, the snakes too cheeky, and Albert advised against our going bush.
[152 I decided the more logical explanation was that Albert considered
777] we ourselves had ample food, and besides he was sincerely worried about his long run of bad luck. But he left with the others that
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evening to kill geese. When they returned with only three geese, a long conference was held. I offered all the food I could spare and it was decided that, in return for a few yams and some of the goose, I should make dampers and put jam on them for the children, all of whom were under five and very hungry, and give small pieces of tobacco to the men and women. This was Albert's, Agnes's, and Big Jack's tobacco, and so everyone traded something and all pronounced it a fair deal. I cooked the damper, smothered it with jam and, with Agnes prompting, called, "Kakritjui Kali." "Little ones, come." The five who could walk, ran, then stood shyly by while I handed each a piece; then they ran back to their mothers. Soon they were back and, nudged by their mothers, all murmured "Thank you very much." This was a phrase I never heard, either in the native language or in English, when they were receiving from another native. Giving and receiving were so much a part of their life that among themselves "thank you's" seemed unnecessary.

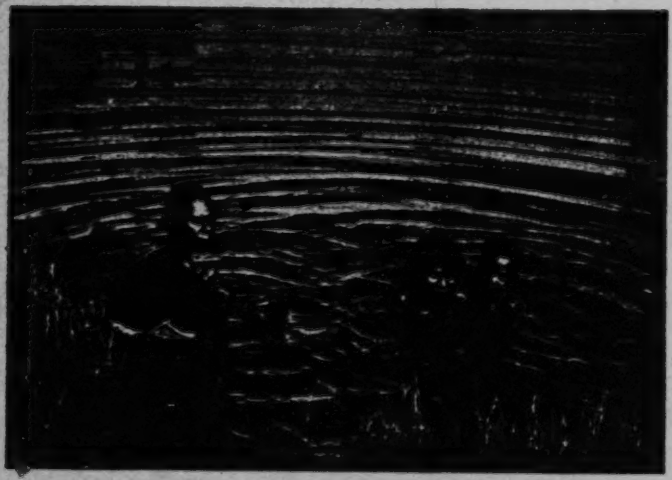

Fig. 16. Agnes, Filicy, and Crissy-boy cooling off in the river

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equally entertaining as she sang some risqué love songs she had 533
picked up around camp.

The evening's goose hunt was even more unsuccessful than the 123
earlier hunts. Two of the men separated and went down river and
killed three geese, but the others, upstream in the usual place, did 223
not even see any, and there was more talk of *mobudities* by everyone
way into the night.

The following day was the last and, as the Assistant Super- 123
intendent was due that evening, feverish work was done by one 648
and all on the long neglected house. Evidently the arrival of Paul
scared off the ghosts, for that evening we almost had a goose per
person, and my final memory of Minianapi is one of flickering fires
in the moonlight and the smell of fresh roasted goose carried on
the gentle breezes.

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Fig. 21. After the return trip the launch's motor gets a much needed overhaul